La Crosse FRO Accomplishment Highlights Report

Aquatic Nuisance Species:

Goby Round-Up Participation
06/09/2003

The Goby Round Up is an annual project organized by the La Crosse FRO and is carried out by 15 entities, including five federal (FWS, EPA, COE, US Army, and USGS), two state (University of Illinois and IL DNR), two regional (Cook County Forest Preserve and Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago), and six local public and private businesses. This past year, there were 14 crews and nearly 50 participants who monitored almost 100 miles of the Illinois Waterway.

During the period of June 9-13, Jessica Kuester, La Crosse Fish Health Center STEP student, accompanied Scott Yess, La Crosse FRO fisheries biologist, for the Goby Round-up. The goal of the yearly Goby Round-up is to monitor the distribution of gobies and Asian carp in the Illinois watersheds. No Asian carp were observed, but more than 15 small gobies were obtained from the Cal Sag canal in Alsip, IL. Responsibilities included setting and pulling nets and sampling some of the fish that were obtained. Jessica took kidney and spleen samples from yellow bullhead, black bullhead, channel catfish, and common carp. Blood samples were also obtained from the 30 carp to test for the virus Spring Viremia. A cameraman from the NBC Nightly News with Tom Brokaw joined the crew on Friday morning to gather some footage for an upcoming segment. The segment will cover the purpose of the Goby Round-up and will be shown at a later date.

Jessica Kuester

Aquatic Nuisance Species:

Invasive Fish Cross Paths in Illinois Waterway
06/13/2003

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Photo by Chris Young

A series of man-made waterways near Chicago link the Great Lakes and Mississippi River drainage basins. These navigable channels were built a century ago to flush sewage away from Lake Michigan, the source of drinking water for the city. More recently however, these canals have acted as portals for invasive aquatic nuisance species to move freely between two of the largest drainage basins in North America. The capability of invasive fish like Asian carp and the round goby to readily disperse here from one basin to another threatens the functional integrity of these vast ecosystems, the survival of certain native fishes, and regional fishing economies in both the United States and Canada. A variety of temporary barriers and management actions, designed to reduce the interbasin movements of fish, have been enacted or are under consideration for use here until a more permanent solution to the problem can be put into place. To help make these control efforts more timely and effective, periodic surveillance with standardized sampling gears deployed at fixed sites is needed to determine the distribution and relative abundance of these invasive fish species. Therefore, Service representatives from eleven field offices (5 Fisheries, 4 Ecological Services, and 2 Refuges) in four midwestern states recently participated in the 8th annual Goby Roundup and 2nd annual Asian carp Corral, a 4-day survey to determine the range and relative abundance of these invasive fish in the upper reaches of the Illinois Waterway System. Other survey participants included representatives from four federal, one state, and two regional resource agencies, five private businesses, and two educational institutions. With an armada of 12 boats, this surveillance activity encompassed a nearly 100-mile continuous reach that included parts of the Calumet-Sag Channel, the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal, the Des Plaines River, and the Illinois River from south Chicago downstream to near Hennepin, Illinois. Round goby were surveyed in near shore habitats throughout the study area, primarily with smelt-baited wire-mesh minnow traps set overnight. Meanwhile, sampling effort for Asian carp was more widely scattered in the study area and relied mostly upon trammel, gill, and fyke nets set overnight. As part of the Service's Wild Fish Health Survey, tissue samples were also collected from round goby and Asian carp to screen for certain viral and bacterial pathogens and parasites. Results of the 2003 survey indicated that the relative abundance of round goby had decreased substantially in the lower reaches of the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal and the Des Plaines River during the past year. In comparison to the 2002 results, round goby catch per unit effort in minnow traps at the three sampling areas located furthest upstream was reduced by 44 percent to 83 percent (63 percent mean reduction). Causes for these significant declines in abundance are unknown. Despite its decreased abundance, a round goby was captured near river mile 278 in the Des Plaines River. This represents a 7-mile expansion in the downstream range of the round goby during the past year and is the greatest expansion in the distribution of this invasive species that has been reported since 1999, when its range grew a distance of 13 miles downstream. Thus, round goby are now at least 55 miles inland from Lake Michigan, about 18 miles downstream of the electrical fish barrier in Romeoville, and have covered about 17 percent of the distance on their way to the Mississippi River. Meanwhile, no Asian carp were collected in the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal, nor in the Des Plaines River, where a bighead carp was captured in 2002 near Channohan. Therefore, Asian carp still appear to be about 21 miles below the electrical fish barrier and 50 miles from Lake Michigan. However, bighead carp, silver carp and grass carp were caught in abundance in the Illinois River near La Salle and Peru, about 100 miles from Lake Michigan. Results of the of fish health survey are not yet available. These surveillance findings were reported in Chicago in early July at meetings of the Asian Carp Rapid Response Team and the Chicago Barrier Advisory Task Force to help guide their upcoming actions to limit the continued dispersal of these invasive fishes.

Mark Steingraeber

Federal and State Lands Assistance:

Fish Thrive Near Habitat Project on the Upper Miss
07/01/2003

Results from this study will give river resource managers the data they need to determine if the habitat projects are of value and what species benefit from such work.

LaCrosse FRO initiated a new project this year as requested by the Upper Mississippi Wildlife and Fish Refuge - Winona District. The study is designed to determine fish usage in Polander Lake's new island complex. These islands were constructed as part of the Habitat Rehabilitation and Enhancement Project (HREP) on the Upper Mississippi River. Several HREP's have islands as a feature built into the project. The goal of these islands is to help break up wind fetch which should reduce suspended sediments. The islands also create slack water habitat which promotes vegetation growth and provides food and cover for both fish and wildlife. The islands also create nesting habitat for waterfowl and turtles.
Fishery monitoring was conducted on June 30th and July 1st and will be conducted for the 3rd and final time in September, this will help determine seasonal use. Both electrofishing and trap netting are conducted at fourteen sites. The fishery looked good and was dominated by bluegill and bass, walleye were also present. Non-game species such as redhorse, drum and carp were also caught. Aquatic vegetation is abundant and provides excellent cover and food. This project is a great follow up to the paddlefish work which was conducted in Polander last year.

Scott Yess

Federal Lands Assistance:

Fishery Surveys Conducted at Tamarac NWR
07/18/2003

Results from this effort will be used to create management plans to better manage the fishery resources of the refuge and to help determine the long term changes to the fishery.

Fishery surveys were conducted at Tamarac NWR by LaCrosse FRO personnel with assistance from the refuge staff. Pine, South Chippewa and Blackbird Lakes were sampled with gill nets and trap nets and at Johnson Lake night electrofishing was conducted. The Ottertail River was also monitored at three separate sections. Initial observations indicate the fishery in Pine and Blackbird Lakes appears to be most appealing to anglers. Pine Lake currently has a good population of northern pike and Blackbird Lake has a nice population of northern pike and pumpkinseed sunfish. The Ottertail river was targeted in an effort to collect lake sturgeon and non-game species. Lake Sturgeon have been stocked in Round Lake which is in the Ottertail drainage. No lake sturgeon were collected however the Ottertail River holds a diverse fish community due to its great water quality and habitat. Data analysis will be conducted during the winter months and management recommendations will be made.

Scott Yess

Tribal Assistance:

White Earth Fish Passage Project Completed
07/21/2003

This fish passage project is a piece to a larger effort which is to link as much of the Red River Drainage as possible to allow fish movement. This will especially benefit the newly restored lake sturgeon populations. Lake Sturgeon are currently being stocked into White Earth Lake now with the passage project they have a chance to migrtate to the Red River and back.

La Crosse FRO joined forces with White Earth DNR on a fish passage project on the White Earth River, on the White Earth Reservation in northwest Minnesota. White Earth Lake is one of the premier lakes on the White Earth Reservation and is currently being stocked with lake sturgeon to restore this majestic fish into the Red River watershed. One obstacle to fish movement within the drainage was the dam on White Earth Lake. It's a small dam built in the 1930's to raise the lake level and store flood water. This dam would not allow fish to migrate back to White Earth Lake, so a plan was prepared by the two offices to create a rock rapids allowing fish passage. Additionally Luther Aadland (Minnesota DNR stream specialist) was consulted for design and engineering on the project. The contract was let by the White Earth DNR to Butch Gordon, and on July 21 the project was completed. This project will not only benefit the recently stocked lake sturgeon but will also provide excellent habitat for several other riverine species. Much gratitude goes to Gary Robideaux who provided access to the project from his property.

Scott Yess

Tribal Assistance:

La Crosse FRO Assists Prairie Island Reservation with Aquatic Vegetation Sampling
07/29/2003

Sixty-six sites were sampled for aquatic vegetation diversity and density, substrate type, and water depth on approximately 800-850 acres of water. This study will help Prairie Island Dakota Community determine the possibility of the establishment of wild rice beds on the Prairie Island Reservation on Sturgeon Lake and North Lake on the Mississippi River.

La Crosse Fishery Resource Office staff and volunteers are currently working with Environmental Project Coordinator, Craig Wills from the Prairie Island Indian Reservation near Red Wing Minnesota on an Aquatic Vegetation Sampling Project in Sturgeon Lake and North Lake on the Mississippi River. Prairie Island Dakota Community is interested in the establishment rice beds in the study area. Very little

data preexists on aquatic vegetation diversity and density, as well as river bottom substrate, and water depth.

La Crosse Fishery Resource Office sampled 35 sites in two bays on North Lake. Random sample points located with GPS coordinates were generated previous to the sample dates. Vegetation in the southern bay included submergent species: sago pondweed, curly pondweed, and coontail. Filamentous algae were also present in the samples. The most abundant plant species was sago pondweed. Water depth averaged about 0.5 meters. Plant density was not very high, but detritus was common. The substrate was mostly a combination of silt and clay. Very little vegetation was found in the northern bay due to higher water levels and current. Average water depth was about 1.5 meters. Substrate was mostly silt with clay or silt with sand. Only one sample contained vegetation, but vegetation was observed at another sample area. Only one emergent vegetation species, white water lily was sampled

In Sturgeon Lake 31 sites were sampled and vegetation included submergent, emergent and floating plant species. Species in the sample sites included: Eurasian watermilfoil, white water lily, small duckweed, sago pondweed, longleaf pondweed, and coontail. Filamentous algae were abundant in the lake. Very little diversity of plant species was observed. The greatest amount of cover observed was Eurasian watermilfoil. Plant density and diversity was not very high in most of the lake, but was higher in the northern part of the lake near the islands. The lake substrate ranged from silt with clay to sand. A mussel bed was found near Site 82 with several different species present. A full report will be completed during the winter months.

Heidi Keuler

Outreach:

Celebrating a Centennial – La Crosse FRO Style
07/31/2003

The National Wildlife Refuge System Centennial Celebration was a great opportunity for the La Crosse FRO, La Crosse Fish Health Center, Genoa National Fish Hatchery, and the La Crosse District Refuge Staff to work together as well as many other federal and state agencies. This was a great chance for outreach and a fun day for families. Children not only learned about history, but also about conservation.

Flags and hands were waving and folk music strumming as the massive and very impressive American Queen docked on the banks of the "Mighty Mississippi" in historic La Crosse, Wisconsin. People from all over the Coulee Region came to see the floating vessel and to partake in the festive activities during the National Wildlife Refuge System Centennial Celebration. Many federal and state agencies as well as local organizations set up exhibits to view, activities to have fun with, and had answers to many questions the public had. The newly created, Friends of the Upper Mississippi Fishery Services had an exhibit and helped pass out beverages with the Refuge's Friends Group. The La Crosse FRO set up several exhibits including: an informational table, an activity called "Factor of Fear," a fishing pond, a fish imprint table, and a casting contest. "Factor of Fear" was a bait touching contest in which the contestants had to hold on to the plastic worm, nightcrawler, or leech for almost half a minute. Children "fished" for prizes at the fishing pond and casted in the casting contest into hula hoops for coloring books. People made their own handkerchiefs with fish on them at the fish imprint table. Rubber molds in the shape of bluegills were painted bright colors, and then different colored handkerchiefs were placed on top and rolled with rollers. Children's faces lit up when they saw a mirror image of the fish they just painted. Even though throughout the day there were thunderstorms and light showers, people's spirits didn't dampen with all the fun to be had at the Centennial Celebration.

Heidi Keuler

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